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# Walking Talking Texts

## Introduction

Walking Talking Texts is a framework for implementing classroom practice in the areas of:

*organising for*

*planning for*

*the teaching of*

*the learning of, and*

*the assessment of*

***English as a second language.***

While addressing the needs of this particular teaching-learning context, Walking Talking Texts

at the same time, enables the teaching and learning of the specific outcomes of the

Board of Studies English Curriculum

of the Northern Territory.

### **Walking Talking Texts-the client group**

Walking Talking Texts has been written for teachers of Aboriginal children.

It has been specifically written for teachers of children in remote Aboriginal community schools by responding to the English language situation of these learners. This program has also been successfully used in teaching migrant ESL learners in Melbourne, and mainstream classes comprising both ESL learners (Aboriginal and migrant) and English first language learners.

For Aboriginal ESL learners in remote communities, there are very few, if any English language contexts outside of school. Children are not able to revisit/reinforce their English language learning by having to interact in English outside of school. As a result, it is more difficult to bring real-life purposes to the learning of English, except to that which occurs in and around school learning.

The contexts for the learning of English, for this group of learners, therefore need to be school based. With this in mind, the teaching /learning contexts are derived from written texts and extended to other curriculum areas of school learning and their associated English language functions, purposes and uses.

This necessarily includes, and concentrates on, spoken (school) genres as well as written.

If the only immediate purpose for the use of English lies within the school, then all activities in which English language is used,

need to be ESL lessons.

Aboriginal children, in remote communities may not be familiar with many of the cultural expectations of school learning, especially when the medium of instruction is English. Aboriginal children do not necessarily know how-to-learn in a school context because the *ways* in which English is used in school for learning, are not encountered by the children in their own language outside of school. Walking Talking Texts provides for much repetition of **shared learning activities** in which the teacher scaffolds the learning **for** and **with** the children before they are asked to work independently. Aboriginal languages traditionally belong to an oral culture in which the use of language differs from the purposes and ways that language is used in its written forms. Even where Aboriginal languages are used in literate forms, the social purposes and use of Aboriginal languages in written forms often differs in purpose and form to those used in English, therefore, children may not necessarily be familiar with the purposes, uses and forms of English language in its written varieties.

Given that the bulk of school-learning is oriented around and towards written texts, Walking Talking Texts concentrates on introducing children to the purposes and uses of written language, in this case, English, by using written texts as stimuli for units of work. During the unit of work, children are placed in contexts where there is a (school) purpose for the use of both written and spoken English.

Intrinsic in the methodology of  
Walking Talking Texts is the aspect of teachers **joining in the shared activities** with children. This means that children are exposed to the deconstruction of the information in written texts and to the purposes of written texts within a school context.

At the same time, spoken English is learnt and used for:

- interaction between teachers and children
- clarification of learning
- reinforcement of learning
- development of spoken English in real contexts,

**before, during and after** the planned activities.

While many Aboriginal children are familiar with, and use conversational English, at the level of formulaic structures and single key words in context, the more complicated spoken language genres of school also need to be taught.

It is necessary to concentrate, not just on written responses in school, but also on teaching children

**how to** participate in the spoken English discourse of school learning. One of the challenging aspects of working in ESL contexts , is that of teaching children

**how to use** spoken English for further learning  
through interactions

with teachers in order learn how to:

- **respond** appropriately to spoken English, and
- **initiate** further learning through the use of spoken English.

All of the activities in the spoken English 'petals' and the central section in the column proforma have been planned so that:

- **teachers talk to/with the children**
- and**
- **children talk to/with the teacher**

**as they** talk together about the activities and the written texts which reflect them.

Aboriginal children who are ESL speakers often feel secure when doing activities that require no individual risk-taking in a Western/English language school context. Many of these children succeed at the level of 'worksheets'. However, they often tend to plateau at a level of Western academic development which requires:

- more active learning on behalf of the individual
- a knowledge of how to learn in a school context
- a facility with the range of English language required for school learning.

Walking Talking Texts addresses the teaching of spoken English by having the teacher scaffold all of the learning activities as well as the language required for these activities in non-threatening (group) situations, before asking children to perform individually. The intended aim of this methodology is that children will:

- practise being active learners in a secure context
  - learn how to be active learners
- before
- having-a-go at being independent, active learners in English language contexts.

### **The Organisation of Walking Talking Texts**

There are two sections in this document:

- the **petal planner**, which provides the framework for the **active teaching-learning of Spoken English**, and the **passive learning about (exposure to) written English**
- the **column planner**, which provides the same framework as the former in its central column and **extends the group teaching-learning experiences into the independent learning and practice of written English skills**, both reading and writing.

Each section contains:

- **the planner**, which sets out the activities in sequence and which can be photocopied for classroom use by the teacher
- **sample(s) of planned units of work** for different year levels, using the planner
- **descriptors of each activity in the planner**, for teachers who need more information on the activities and their purposes, and how to go about teaching through them.

### Using Walking Talking Texts

Teachers in Bilingual schools where the first three to five years of school:

- teach **literacy in and through the vernacular language** (the children's first language) and at the same time,
  - teach **spoken English** before English literacy is introduced in the middle primary years
- will find that the **petal planner** suits this context.

Teachers in schools which are **both bilingual and biliterate from Transition**,

as well as

schools where **English-only** is the medium of instruction,  
will find that the **column planner** is relevant.



The column planner provides for scaffolded learning in the central column before organising for the children to have-a-go at **independent writing** in the left-hand column and literacy exercises to practise skills in written English in the right-hand column (**exercises**).

All of the activities in both planners have been sequentially marked. The order of activities is important, however, it is not necessary to do every activity for every unit. Some texts will suggest a wide range of related learning contexts, others may relate to only two or three other learning contexts.

Walking Talking Texts provides for the integration of some aspects of the primary curriculum, thus making links between different areas of Western knowledge which may not otherwise be accessible to Aboriginal children when the knowledge of school is divided into different timetabled slots throughout the day, with no apparent relationship.

For children whose home cultures are reflected in the processes of school, making these links between the separate 'chunks' of learning in school, is easier. For this group of children, the contexts for learning and the links between different learning experiences are often automatically made due to the cultural knowledge they bring to school. Where children come to school with cultural knowledge that is not reflected in the processes of school, there is need for the school-learning contexts to be made explicit so that these learners can access the knowledge and processes expected of them in school-learning situations.

### The learning contexts

in *Walking Talking Texts* have been planned so that they are:

- physical, so that children can see, hear, feel, touch and do
- accessible, through scaffolded learning with the teacher
- language-rich (spoken and written) in purposeful, school-based contexts.

### Teaching mixed-ability groups

Where teachers are familiar with the breath and depth of the primary curriculum, it is possible to plan for different levels of learners within the one *Walking Talking Texts* unit.

In other words, teacher and children all participate in the **same shared experience**. Teachers can then plan for children to operate at levels appropriate to their stage of learning in both:

- the group activities and
- the individual activities in the side columns of the column planner.

(The sample Unit *Mr Wolf* was planned for and trialled in a mixed-aged class (Transition-Year 7).

### Incorporating Walking Talking Texts into the timetable

Walking Talking Texts will take from about half an hour a day in Transition, to anywhere between two and three hours a day in the upper primary grades.

The increase in time is due to the increasing complexity of the texts and the related activities needed to challenge older learners.

### **Choosing appropriate texts to use with Walking Talking Texts**

Any text which lends itself, through extension to other activities, is appropriate.

The best texts are generally the ones that teachers like themselves, as a level of enthusiasm is then naturally brought to the learning activities.

Pieces of children's literature are ideal, although they need to be well chosen so that cultural content is accessible to the learners through:

- personal experience via the planned activities, *(e.g. if the stimulus text referred to shopping, a visit to the community store)*
- secondary experience, *(e.g. viewing videos showing shopping scenes, exploring pictured texts supported by teacher talk)*
- comparison with personal experiences through approximations of the real experience, *(e.g. role play in a classroom shop)*

Reading schemes also need to be chosen with good judgement regarding both the content and the language used. One advantage of reading schemes is that they present written language which increases in complexity as children progress through school. This can be beneficial for literacy activities and for knowing what language children have 'covered'. However, books limited to a certain language level can sometimes mean that some books in some reading schemes may contain language which is awkward in its use, and which does not really reflect the actual written use of that language, and even less, the actual spoken use. It is recommended that the same criteria be used to choose individual texts from within reading schemes as applies to the choice of literature. The quality of the stimulus text is very important in the use of Walking Talking Texts, as it both establishes and maintains motivation through a variety of learning contexts. When the first edition of this framework (Walkin' Talkin' Stories) was written, the Rigby Storybox scheme was new and offered a refreshing use of written language within a reading scheme. For this reason, it was adopted for use with Walkin' Talkin' Stories. There now exists a range of reading schemes containing some enriching material, which schools may like to evaluate in the context of their use with Walking Talking Texts.

Many of these are listed in the back of the  
*Learning English in Aboriginal Schools* documents for reference.

Schools may choose to make up their own text lists for different groups of children.

Alternatively, some new titles have been added to the original list . See page 207.

### **The role of the teacher as an Active Teacher in using Walking Talking Texts**

As was stated at the beginning of this section, Walking Talking Texts is a framework for implementing classroom  
practise in the areas of:

- organising for
- planning for
- **the teaching of**
- the learning of, and
- the assessment of

***English as a second language.***

Teachers have many roles. In the teaching of Walking Talking Texts, the strategy of scaffolding has been  
written into the methodology to provide support for **learning English, learning about English**

and **learning through English** for a variety of uses:

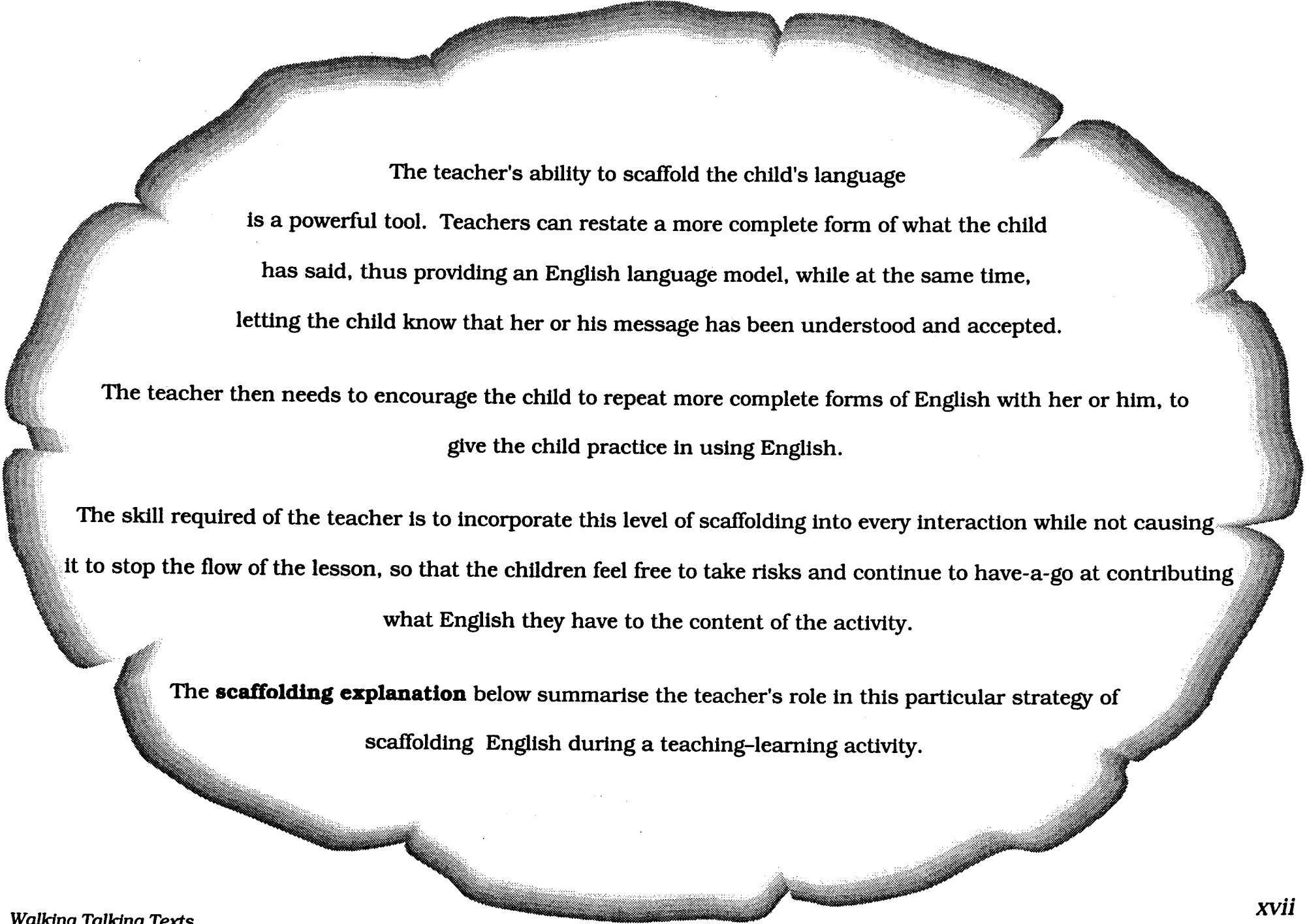
- interpersonal
- informational, and
- **aesthetic** (Australian Language Levels Guidelines)

Within the context of the suggested activities,  
**scaffolding requires active teaching.**

Second language learners need to:

- hear
- see
- practise, and
- use

the English language of the learning contexts many times before they feel confident to take risks in using English in similar learning contexts. Many ESL Aboriginal children demonstrate a willingness to take risks in group discussion, group-negotiated-texts, etc, by using single English words (these are often **keywords** which carry much of the meaning, but which are not expressed in a grammatically full form). It is often the case in these learning contexts, that the teacher understands what the children are trying to say, accepts the utterance and acts upon it. While acting on the meaning or the communicative message is necessary for real communication, ESL learners also need to **develop** their English beyond this point.



The teacher's ability to scaffold the child's language is a powerful tool. Teachers can restate a more complete form of what the child has said, thus providing an English language model, while at the same time, letting the child know that her or his message has been understood and accepted.

The teacher then needs to encourage the child to repeat more complete forms of English with her or him, to give the child practice in using English.

The skill required of the teacher is to incorporate this level of scaffolding into every interaction while not causing it to stop the flow of the lesson, so that the children feel free to take risks and continue to have-a-go at contributing what English they have to the content of the activity.

The **scaffolding explanation** below summarise the teacher's role in this particular strategy of scaffolding English during a teaching-learning activity.

*The teacher joins the learners  
in activities to scaffold the English language in order to:*

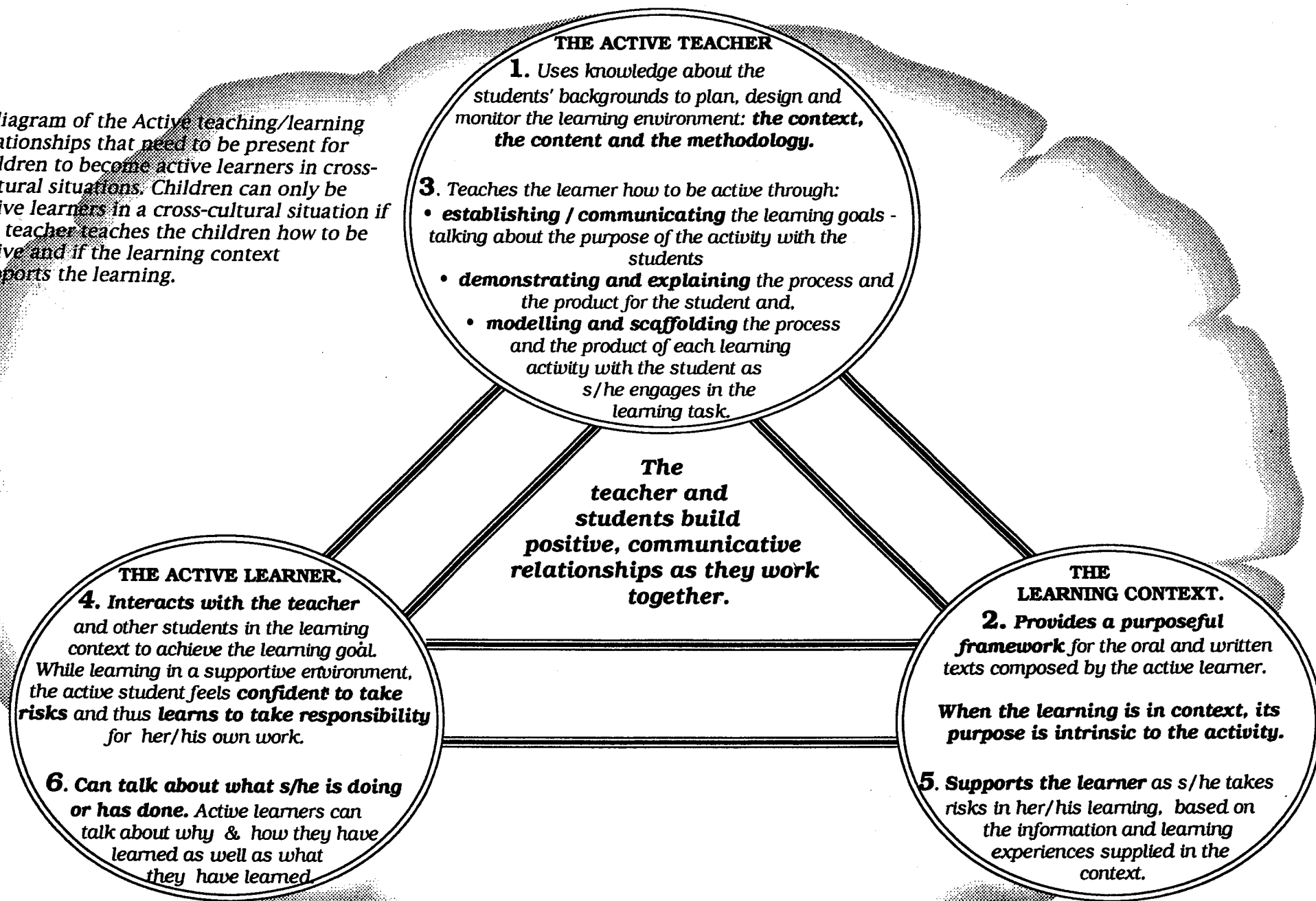
- *provide the words and the English language structure needed by the students for that activity*
- *provide the English words to talk about the Western concepts in that activity.*

**Scaffolding is done by:**

- *EXPECTING the students to supply whatever English they are able to, within the context of that activity*
- *BUILDING ONTO the words given by the students by rephrasing what the student has said in more complete English*
- *SUPPLYING words and English language structures which the students are not able to give, at the point at which they need to use the English*
- *ENCOURAGING AND EXPECTING the student to use the rephrased language either to*
  - restate what she/he said, or*
  - use later, in the same context, for a communicative purpose.*



A diagram of the Active teaching/learning relationships that need to be present for children to become active learners in cross-cultural situations. Children can only be active learners in a cross-cultural situation if the teacher teaches the children how to be active and if the learning context supports the learning.



The Table of Language Use, (Australian Language Levels Guidelines, Book 2, page 22), depicts the varieties of language use across languages.

The activities in Walking Talking Texts have been analysed using these criteria. This analysis can be found on page 3 and pages 43-45 of this text.

